

GROWERTALKS

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Spring 2019: Better Than the Data

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A small, but dedicated, group of *Acres Online* readers contribute weekly to my *GrowerTalks* Spring Weekend Survey by sending me scores (on a scale of 1 to 10) indicating the quality/quantity of business they experienced the previous weekend. I publish the results from the first weekend in April to the third weekend in June, then I do a season-long summary to wrap it all up.

The results? Spring 2019 scored 7.3 in the U.S. and 7.2 in Canada. That's based on 1,129 scores sent in over 12 weekends.

At first, I was disappointed, but then I looked back at previous seasons. Spring 2018 scored a much-worse 6.7 in the U.S. and 6.7 in Canada. I went back further: 2017 was 7.0/5.9, 2016 was 7.1/7.6, 2015 was 6.9/6.6, and 2014 was 6.7/6.5. In other words, spring 2019 was the best for the U.S., and the second-best for Canada, in six seasons!

What's even more interesting is when I ask my readers to give me a 1 to 10 score for the entire season based on their gut instincts, the answer? Almost a point higher in the U.S. and almost two points higher in Canada—8.2 and 9.0—than the “official” score. Nineteen respondents rated their season a perfect 10 and another 18 gave it a 9.

I credit the optimistic view of the season to three causes:

- 1. Plant business people are naturally optimistic.** It goes back to our agricultural roots, when our ancestors put a seed in the ground believing in the promise that it would make a finished crop, despite knowing all the things that could go wrong between now and then.
- 2. Plant business people have short memories.** If the season finishes strong, we tend to remember the good and forget the snow in April and the rain on Mother's Day.
- 3. Plant business people mentally add up the important weekends and ignore the less important.** My 12-week spreadsheet, conversely, weighs every weekend equally. This last explanation is borne out by the data: If I drop April and only calculate the average for May and June, the U.S. average climbs to 8.2 ... identical to the gut score! (May and June in Canada average out to 8.0, compared to 9.0 for the gut score, which can only mean that Canadian plant people are even more optimistic than their American counterparts.)

I was impressed with how many of you rated it a perfect 10. Here are a few comments in explanation:

Ohio (10) “This is our sixth year in this location and sales have greatly increased each year, including this one (averaging over 25%). How can I give it anything but a 10? Community support for our small, family-owned business has been tremendous.”—Kim Grant, Strait Gate Greenhouses

Wyoming (10) “Difficult May with cold and wet weather, [yet we were] only 2.5% below average. June knocked it out of the ballpark—70% above average and 24.4% above the previous June record. No complaints here! Already set an annual record and we are open year-round.”—Jeff Jones, Great Gardens

Washington (10) “Trying to nail down what exactly we can credit for such a great spring is tricky this year—was it the good weather, a strong economy, a brutal dose of winter for the entire month of February (a rarity in our parts) that fueled spring fever, the growth of our community, our marketing or something else? In any case, we had a record-breaking spring and sold out of so much so early we didn’t even have to have a greenhouse clearance sale like normal.”—David Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery

Now, all that said, I fully understand that some of you had a horrible season. I heard the stories about one of the big boxes canceling orders and leaving some growers hanging or scrambling. The Plains (6.6) were under water much of spring and may still be mopping up, for all I know.

But despite the challenges, even those of you who didn’t have the kind of spring you wanted remained upbeat. Like my friend Gene Pielin of Gulley Greenhouse in Colorado. Gene scored his whole season a below-average 7, but I sense he was wearing a wry smile as he typed this:

“The sun finally came out and the rain and snow stopped and gardens were planted and the customers are still coming in. Could it have been better? Sure. But I’d say that no matter what.” **GT**